



# The Cleveland Museum of Art

September 18, 1993

## UKIYO-E: THE FLOATING WORLD REVISITED February 2 - April 3, 1994

**The Floating World Revisited** attempts what no other exhibition of the Japanese art known as *ukiyo-e* has done: it presents that art's golden age (1781-1801) within the broader sweep of the history of Japanese art, treating specific works and specific artists in generous detail to illuminate the many connections among them.

The themes of the exhibition are: the strong links tying *ukiyo-e*, an art of the newly rich merchant class, to classical traditions of Japanese art; the intimate links between literature and art (leading to the development of such hybrid genres as the *surimono* and the *kibyoshi*); the significance of place, specifically of the development of a distinctive Edo (Tokyo) sensibility; and the key roles played by the most charismatic of the 18th-century creators of *ukiyo-e*.

This period of Japanese art, when the standards of artists and patrons were at their most discerning, is much less known in the West than the later 19th-century developments familiar especially through woodblock prints. **The Floating World Revisited** embraces all of *ukiyo-e*--scroll and screen paintings, book illustrations, albums and sketches as well as prints. It places them in the context of the sensibility that created other art objects, such as lavish kimono worn by great courtesans and elegant desk objects favored by poets.

About 150 works will be exhibited, from public and private collections in Europe, the United States, and Japan. Among them will be works by such well-known figures as Utamaro and Hokusai, and major works by less familiar but equally accomplished masters.

The exhibition is organized by the Portland Art Museum, Oregon, with help from curators at Tokyo National Museum and from leading Japanese scholars. **The Floating World Revisited** opens in Portland during the winter of 1993 and in Cleveland, at The Cleveland Museum of Art, in February and March of 1994. Because the objects are so fragile, they will be shown nowhere else.

The exhibition in Cleveland complements the Museum's rich collection of Japanese art, one of the few in the West that successfully combines *ukiyo-e* paintings and prints as part of comprehensive holdings that include superb examples from every period of Japanese art.

## FACT SHEET

Title: *The Floating World Revisited*

When & Where: Portland Art Museum, October 26–December 30, 1993  
Cleveland Museum of Art, February 2–April 2, 1994

What: *The Floating World Revisited* is the first exhibition to relate the art of the golden age of ukiyo-e (1781-1801) to the glittering world of writers, actors and courtesans that inspired it. Borrowing from an international array of public and private collections in Europe, the United States and Japan, curator Donald Jenkins has assembled some 140 works that reveal for the first time the full range of expression and the many layers of meaning to be found in the "pictures of the floating world" that are acknowledged to be among Japan's most distinctive works of art.

Contents: Scroll paintings, screens, illustrated albums and a selection of decorative arts. The exhibition dispels the common misconception that ukiyo-e was a phenomenon limited to prints. Many of the paintings and art objects included have never before been exhibited in the United States.

Organizers: The Portland Art Museum: Exhibition curator Donald Jenkins, Curator of Asian Art

Support: *The Floating World Revisited* is supported by a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities, a federal agency. Additional support is provided by the Asian Art Council of the Portland Art Museum, the Japan Foundation, the Metropolitan Center for Far Eastern Art Studies and the Kaneko Foundation for International Research and Education. Individual contributors include Mrs. James Castles, Mildred Schnitzer, Andrée Stevens and Jean Vollum.

Catalogue A fully illustrated catalogue, with both color and black and white photographs, complements the exhibition and will be available in late October.

###

# *The Floating World Revisited*

Portland Art Museum, October 26–December 30, 1993

Cleveland Museum of Art, February 2–April 2, 1994

## Introduction

The first exhibition to relate the art of the golden age of ukiyo-e (1781-1801) to the glittering world of writers, actors and courtesans that inspired it, *The Floating World Revisited*, opens at the Portland Art Museum in Portland, Oregon, October 26, 1993.

Borrowing from an international array of public and private collections in Europe, the United States and Japan, curator Donald Jenkins has assembled some 140 works that reveal for the first time the full range of expression and the many layers of meaning to be found in the "pictures of the floating world" that are acknowledged to be among Japan's most distinctive works of art. By including scroll paintings, screens, illustrated albums and a selection of decorative arts, the exhibition also dispels the common misconception that ukiyo-e was a phenomenon limited to prints. Many of the paintings and art objects included have never before been exhibited in the United States.

*The Floating World Revisited* focuses on the twenty year period when ukiyo-e masters such as Kiyonaga, Utamaro, Sharaku and Eishi created their most memorable images—works that have been so widely reproduced and universally admired that for many they have come to epitomize Japanese art. Yet, without knowledge of the context in which these works were created, viewing them is like hearing half a conversation, and often leads us to misinterpret or overlook the intent expressed.

This exhibition provides the other half of the conversation by recreating enough of the vanished world of late 18th century Edo to illuminate the art in new and surprising ways. Much of the work is presented as though seen through the eyes of four celebrated personalities of the period: a courtesan, two writers and an actor. And distinctive features of the cultural life of the time—such as the continuing influence of classical traditions and the interdependence of art and literature—are discussed in wall labels and the catalogue.

(MORE)

Exhibition curator Donald Jenkins is Curator of Asian Art at the Portland Art Museum and the primary author of the catalogue that will accompany the show. Mr. Jenkins is the 1993 recipient of the Uchiyama Susumu Memorial Award given annually by the Japan Ukiyo-e Society to scholars who have made notable contributions to the field of ukiyo-e studies. In preparing the exhibition, he consulted with internationally recognized experts in 18th century Japanese history, literature and art.

The exhibition travels to the Cleveland Museum of Art in Cleveland, Ohio for viewing February 2 - April 2, 1994. *The Floating World Revisited* is supported by a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities, a federal agency. Additional support is provided by the Asian Art Council of the Portland Art Museum, the Japan Foundation, the Metropolitan Center for Far Eastern Art Studies and the Kaneko Foundation for International Research and Education. Individual contributors include Mrs. James Castles, Mildred Schnitzer, Andrée Stevens and Jean Vollum.

### Catalogue

A fully illustrated catalogue, with both color and black and white photographs, complements the exhibition and will be available in late October of 1993. The catalogue is written by Donald Jenkins with the assistance of Lynn Jacobsen Katsumoto. It contains essays contributed by Haruko Iwasaki (University of California Santa Barbara), Kobayashi Tadashi (Shugakuin University, Tokyo), Laurence Kominz (Portland State University) and Henry D. Smith II, (Columbia University). Copies of the catalogue may be ordered through the Museum Shop of the Portland Art Museum, (503) 226-2811.

# The Floating World Revisited

## BACKGROUND

Amidst the famine, fire and economic disarray that erupted in Japan in the late eighteenth century, the city of Edo, (or Tokyo as we know it today) was flourishing. The huge retinue of the shogun, the system of vassal rotation, the upsurge in merchant activity—all this brought an influx of population to Edo which grew to over a million.

As the merchants prospered and the warriors were left without wars to fight, the demand for entertainment swelled. New forms of popular literature emerged—usually comic, sometimes satirical—while the newly educated bourgeoisie were also interested in throwbacks to the classics. Poetry that drew from traditional sources often accompanied picture prints for popular distribution. The stars of the kabuki theatre and courtesans of the pleasure quarter were celebrated in pictures and in literature, and they were looked to for the latest in fashionable garb and wit.

Money was a great democratic force in the licensed quarter where people of all classes mingled, quite unlike the REAL world where the government maintained firm control over public behavior and expression to maintain order and authority.

This is the setting of the Floating World, which the exhibition invites you to visit to gain a new perspective on life in the golden age of ukiyo-e, and, a deeper understanding of the crosscurrents that produced the great art of the Edo Period.

## The World of Ukiyo-e

The Japanese art familiar to most people — stylized figures of kimono-clad beauties, dramatic caricatures of actors, landscapes of famous views—are in fact pictures of the "floating world," or "ukiyo-e." The Floating World was inhabited by real people who shared a sophisticated world view. And the times, the last two decades of the 18th century, were turbulent, marked by polar shifts in government administration. The colorful Temmei Period (1781-89) under the permissive and corrupt administration of Okitsugu Tanuma gave way to the repressive Kansei Period (1789 to 1801) when Sadanobu Matsudaira imposed sumptuary laws and enforced a strict neo-Confucianist social structure.

In the Edo Period, society was rigidly divided into classes of warriors (samurai), farmers, artisans, and merchants (*chônin*), the very lowest rung of the social ladder. The feudal lords, who owed their loyalty only to the shogun, paid their vassals and warriors stipends of rice; but as commerce developed and the merchants

(MORE)

Meanwhile, the theatre was evolving as a vehicle for expressing the attitudes, values and beliefs of the Floating World, offering day-long performances in performance halls throughout the theatre district. Dynasties of acting families, such as the Ichikawa and Nakamura successions, became identified with particular styles and roles.

### The Surge in Popular Literature

In literature, entrepreneurial publishers sought out artists and writers to satisfy the public hunger for books and prints. Classical traditions of poetry contests among the upper class, inscriptions of poetry on paintings, calligraphy appreciated for both form and content, and a sense of humor based on the richness of the Japanese language coalesced into new styles of expression. *Kyôka*, or comic verse, which parodied ancient poetry became a popular pastime (and incidentally allowed people to parade the depth of their learning). New works of fiction were eagerly awaited for their thinly disguised allusions to popular celebrities. *Kibyôshi*, or "yellow-covers," were illustrated books where image and text often were written in counterpoint, enabling many layers of meaning—and humor—to coexist on the page. *Sharebon*, or fashion books, gave accounts of the pleasure quarters, and titillated with tips on how to behave with courtesans. These and other published works formed the genre of "gesaku" or "playful works"—a literary style completely unique to the Floating World.

### A Milieu of "Beautiful People"

Major figures of Edo culture will be introduced to visitors as they pass through the various sections of the exhibition. First, they will be oriented to the city itself, to become familiar with the actual locations of Yoshiwara, the theatre district, and other major neighborhoods. Next, they will enter the world of the high-ranking courtesans, embodied by one of the most celebrated women of her time, Hanaôgi. One of her portraits appeared in an elaborate album created by Santô Kyôden (1761-1816), the next personality with whom *Floating World Revisited* viewers will become acquainted. A gifted writer and artist, Kyôden was a prosperous merchant who also ran a tobacco shop, and is often acclaimed for having given the period its flair and style. His contemporary, Ota Nampo (1749-1823), led the *kyôka* movement and as a samurai was instrumental in bringing together people from various walks of life through poetry parties and other social gatherings of a literary or artistic nature. And finally, the flamboyant figure of Ichikawa Danjuro V (1741-1806), who characterized the spirit of Edo on stage, will be portrayed through his numerous stage roles as well as through his poetry.

(MORE)